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2016

## Campus Climate Assessment Project Executive Summary

Armstrong State University

Rankin & Associates Consulting

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Armstrong State University affirms that diversity and inclusion are crucial to the intellectual vitality of the campus community. It is through freedom of exchange over different ideas and viewpoints in supportive environments that individuals develop the critical thinking and citizenship skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. Diversity and inclusion engender academic engagement where teaching, working, learning, and living take place in pluralistic communities of mutual respect.

Armstrong State University is dedicated to fostering a caring community that provides leadership for constructive participation in a diverse, multicultural world. As noted in the University's mission statement, "Armstrong is teaching-centered and student-focused, providing diverse learning experiences and professional programs grounded in the liberal arts."<sup>1</sup> Two of the core values of the institution include the following tenets that support Armstrong State University's commitment to equity and inclusion:

- We value and respect diversity.
- We value civic engagement through outreach and service
- We value an environment of mutual trust and collegiality that builds an inclusive community.<sup>2</sup>

In order to better understand the campus climate at Armstrong State University, the President formed a workgroup comprised of faculty, staff, students, and administrators to address the need for a comprehensive tool that would provide campus climate metrics for students, faculty, and staff across the University.

To that end, the Climate Study Working Group (CSWG) convened in 2014. Ultimately, Armstrong State University contracted with Rankin & Associates Consulting (R&A) to conduct a campus-wide study entitled, "Armstrong State University Confidential Assessment of Climate for Learning, Living, and Working." Data gathered focused on the experiences and perceptions of various constituent groups. Based on the findings, two

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.armstrong.edu/About/armstrong\\_facts/mission\\_statement](http://www.armstrong.edu/About/armstrong_facts/mission_statement)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.armstrong.edu/About/armstrong\\_facts/mission\\_statement](http://www.armstrong.edu/About/armstrong_facts/mission_statement)

to three action items will be developed through community forums and completed by fall 2016.

### **Project Design and Campus Involvement**

The CSWG collaborated with R&A to develop the survey instrument. In the first phase, R&A conducted 13 focus groups comprised of 65 participants (44 women; 21 men). Data from the focus groups informed the CSWG and R&A in constructing questions for the campus-wide survey.

The Armstrong State University survey contained 101 items (17 qualitative and 84 quantitative) and was available via a secure online portal from January 28 through February 11, 2015. Confidential paper surveys were distributed to those individuals who did not have access to an Internet-connected computer or who preferred a paper survey.

### **Armstrong State University Participants**

Armstrong State University community members completed 1,466 surveys for an overall response rate of 21%. Only surveys that were at least 50% completed were included in the final data set for analyses.<sup>3</sup> Response rates by constituent group varied: 17% ( $n = 1,014$ ) for Undergraduate Students, 15% ( $n = 108$ ) for Graduate Students, 51% ( $n = 210$ ) for Staff/Administrators, and 28% ( $n = 134$ ) for Faculty. Table 1 provides a summary of selected demographic characteristics of survey respondents. The percentages offered in Table 1 are based on the numbers of respondents in the sample ( $n$ ) for the specific demographic characteristic.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Eighteen respondents were removed because they did not complete at least 50% of the survey.

<sup>4</sup>The total  $n$  for each demographic characteristic will differ as a result of missing data.

**Table 1. Armstrong State University Sample Demographics**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Subgroup</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>% of Sample</b>
<b>Position Status</b>	Undergraduate Student	1,014	69.2
	Graduate Student	108	7.4
	Staff/Administrator	210	14.3
	Faculty Ranked Administrator	17	1.2
	Teaching Faculty	117	8.0
<b>Gender Identity</b>	Man	359	24.6
	Woman	1,077	73.5
	Transgender/Genderqueer/Other	20	1.4
<b>Racial Identity</b>	White	797	54.4
	Person of Color	507	34.6
	Multiple Race	133	9.1
<b>Sexual Identity</b>	LGBQ	151	10.3
	Heterosexual	1,201	81.9
	Asexual/Other	84	5.7
<b>Citizenship Status</b>	U.S. Citizen	1,362	92.9
	Non-U.S. Citizen	55	3.8
	Undocumented	0	0
	Multiple Citizenships	17	1.2
<b>Disability Status</b>	No Disability	1,162	79.3
	Single Disability	209	14.3
	Multiple Disabilities	50	3.4
<b>Military Status</b>	Military Service	127	8.7
	No Military Service	1,332	90.9
<b>Religious/Spiritual Affiliation</b>	Christian Affiliation	1,001	68.3
	Other Faith-Based Affiliation	51	3.5
	No Affiliation	322	22.0
	Multiple Affiliations	46	3.1
	Other	20	1.4

Note: The total *n* for each demographic characteristic differs as a result of missing data.

## **Key Findings – Areas of Strength**

### **1. High levels of comfort with the climate at Armstrong State University**

Climate is defined as the “the current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of faculty, staff, administrators, and students concerning the level of respect for individual needs, abilities, and potential.”<sup>5</sup> The level of comfort experienced by faculty, staff/administrators, and students is one indicator of campus climate.

- 79% ( $n = 1,153$ ) of the survey respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate at Armstrong State University.
- 77% ( $n = 264$ ) of Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their departments/work units.
- 85% ( $n = 863$ ) of Undergraduate Student respondents and 88% ( $n = 94$ ) of Graduate Student respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.
- 91% ( $n = 121$ ) of Faculty respondents were “comfortable” or “very comfortable” with the climate in their classes.

### **2. Faculty and Staff/Administrators – Positive attitudes about work-life issues**

Campus climate<sup>6</sup> is constituted in part by perceptions of work, sense of balance between work and home life, and opportunities for personal and professional development throughout the span of one’s career. Work-life balance is one indicator of campus climate.

- 74% ( $n = 248$ ) of Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents were comfortable taking leave that they were entitled to without fear that it may affect their job/careers.
- 69% ( $n = 232$ ) of Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents found Armstrong State University supportive of flexible work schedules.

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<sup>5</sup>Rankin & Reason, 2008, p. 264

<sup>6</sup>Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006.

- 72% ( $n = 241$ ) of Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents indicated that they had supervisors at Armstrong State University who give them career advice or guidance when they need it.
- 68% ( $n = 223$ ) of Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents agreed that their supervisors provide ongoing feedback to help them improve their performance.

Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents were provided the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences with work-life issues. Common themes were: (1) *Work harder*, respondents indicated that they believed they needed to work harder than their colleagues/coworkers do to achieve the same recognition; (2) *Divergent views on support for professional development*, respondents described mixed experiences regarding their access to professional development, citing differences between supervisors as the primary reason for the differences in support. These themes and selected comments that support each theme are provided in the full report.

### **3. Faculty – Positive attitudes about faculty work**

- Faculty respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the tenure/promotion process was clear (71%,  $n = 89$ ) and standards were reasonable (73%,  $n = 91$ ).
- 71% ( $n = 89$ ) of Faculty respondents reported feeling that their service contributions were important to tenure/promotion/reappointment.
- 68% ( $n = 77$ ) of Faculty respondents reported feeling that their diversity-related contributions have been/will be valued for promotion or tenure.

Faculty respondents were provided the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences regarding faculty work. Thirty-four Faculty respondents elaborated on their experience of work life related to tenure and advancement processes. The primary theme was: (1) *Not applicable*, respondents indicated that many of the statements did not apply to them because they identified as part-time or non-tenure-track faculty. This theme and selected comments that support this theme are provided in the full report.

#### **4. Students – *Academic Success and Intent to Persist***

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted on two scales: “Academic Success” and “Intent to Persist.” Analyses using these scales revealed:

- Women Undergraduate Student respondents ( $\bar{X} = 1.9$ ) experienced significantly greater academic success than did Men Undergraduate Student respondents ( $\bar{X} = 2.0$ ); Women and Men Undergraduate Student respondents were equally likely to persist.
- White Undergraduate Student respondents ( $\bar{X} = 1.8$ ) experienced significantly greater academic success than did African-American/Black Undergraduate Student respondents ( $\bar{X} = 2.0$ ), Hispanic/Latino(a)/Chicano(a) Undergraduate Student respondents ( $\bar{X} = 2.1$ ), Undergraduate Student Respondents of Color ( $\bar{X} = 2.0$ ), or Multiple Race Undergraduate Student respondents ( $\bar{X} = 1.9$ ); all groups were equally likely to persist.
- Undergraduate Student respondents who had No Disability ( $\bar{X} = 1.9$ ) experienced significantly greater academic success than did Undergraduate Student respondents with a Single Disability ( $\bar{X} = 2.0$ ) or Multiple Disabilities ( $\bar{X} = 2.2$ ); all groups were equally likely to persist.
- Undergraduate Student respondents who had No Military Service ( $\bar{X} = 1.9$ ) had significantly greater academic success than respondents who had Military Service ( $\bar{X} = 2.1$ ); both groups were equally likely to persist.

## Key Findings – Opportunities for Improvement

### 1. Members of several constituent groups were differentially affected by exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

Several empirical studies reinforce the importance of the perception of non-discriminatory environments for positive learning and developmental outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Research also underscores the relationship between workplace discrimination and subsequent productivity.<sup>8</sup> The survey requested information on experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

- 14% ( $n = 205$ ) of respondents indicated that they personally had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.<sup>9</sup>
- Of those respondents who indicated that they had experienced such conduct, 26% ( $n = 53$ ) indicated that the conduct was based on their age. Twenty-four percent ( $n = 50$ ) of these respondents said that the conduct was based on their position at Armstrong State University and 22% ( $n = 45$ ) reported that it was based on their ethnicity.
- Differences emerged based on various demographic characteristics, including position status, age, and racial identity. For example:
  - Significantly lower percentages of Graduate Student respondents (7%,  $n = 7$ ), Undergraduate Student respondents (12%,  $n = 122$ ), and Faculty respondents (12%,  $n = 16$ ) than Staff/Administrator respondents (29%,  $n = 60$ ) reported having experienced this conduct.
  - A greater percentage of respondents ages 55 through 64 (19%,  $n = 14$ ) reported that they had experienced exclusionary conduct than did other respondents.

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<sup>7</sup>Aguirre & Messineo, 1997; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001.

<sup>8</sup>Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Waldo, 1999.

<sup>9</sup>The literature on microaggressions is clear that this type of conduct has a negative influence on people who experience the conduct, even if they feel at the time that it had no impact (Sue, 2010; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).



- Higher percentages of Other Respondents of Color (15%,  $n = 75$ ) and White respondents (13%,  $n = 105$ ) than Multiple Race respondents (10%,  $n = 13$ ) reported that they had experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct.

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences of exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct. Common themes included: (1) *Faculty offender*, respondents offered that often the source of the exclusionary conduct was a faculty member. Several Student respondents noted that faculty made them feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in the classroom; (2) *Hostile work environment*, respondents indicated that the conduct they experienced made their work environment hostile. These themes and selected comments that support each theme are provided in the full report.

## **2. Several constituent groups indicated that they were less comfortable with the overall campus climate, workplace climate, and classroom climate.**

Prior research on campus climate has focused on the experiences of faculty, staff, and students associated with historically underserved social/community/affinity groups (e.g., women, people of color, people with disabilities, first-generation students, veterans).<sup>10</sup> Several groups indicated that they were less comfortable than their majority counterparts with the climates of the campus, workplace, and classroom.

- Differences by Position Status:
  - Staff/Administrator respondents (14%,  $n = 39$ ) were less comfortable than were Faculty respondents (29%,  $n = 30$ ) with the overall campus climate at Armstrong State University.

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<sup>10</sup>Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Norris, 1992; Rankin, 2003; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, & Hart, 2008.

- Differences by Racial Identity:
  - African-American/Black respondents (23%,  $n = 86$ ) were less comfortable with the overall climate than were White respondents (34%,  $n = 268$ ) and Hispanic/Latino(a)/Chicano(a) respondents (38%,  $n = 28$ ).
  - Other Faculty and Staff/Administrator Respondents of Color (33%,  $n = 21$ ) were less comfortable with the climate in their departments/work units than were White (37%,  $n = 92$ ) and Multiple Race (42%,  $n = 8$ ) Faculty and Staff/Administrator respondents.
- Differences by Sexual Identity:
  - LGBTQ respondents (25%,  $n = 37$ ) were less comfortable with the overall climate than were Heterosexual respondents (32%,  $n = 384$ ) and Asexual/Other respondents (27%,  $n = 23$ ).

**3. A small but meaningful percentage of respondents experienced unwanted sexual contact.**

In 2014, *Not Alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault* indicated that sexual assault is a significant issue for colleges and universities nationwide, affecting the physical health, mental health, and academic success of students. The report highlights that one in five women is sexually assaulted while in college. One section of the Armstrong State University survey requested information regarding sexual assault.

- 2% ( $n = 27$ ) of respondents indicated on the survey that they had experienced unwanted sexual contact while at Armstrong State University.
- These respondents rarely reported the unwanted sexual contact.

Respondents were offered the opportunity to elaborate on why they did not report unwanted sexual contact. Twenty respondents provided written responses. Owing to the low number of responses, no central theme emerged, but micro-themes included: (1) *Embarrassed*, respondents indicated that they were embarrassed and were concerned that they would only further embarrass themselves; (2) *Perpetrator's reputation*, respondents indicated that they were concerned that

they would ruin the perpetrator's life and reputation if they reported the conduct; and (3) *Fear*, some respondents offered that they were afraid of physical harm if they reported the unwanted sexual contact. These themes and selected comments that support each theme are provided in the full report.

## Conclusion

Armstrong State University's campus climate findings<sup>11</sup> are mostly consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country based on the work of R&A Consulting.<sup>12</sup> For example, 70% to 80% of all respondents in similar reports found the campus climate to be "comfortable" or "very comfortable." Likewise, 79% of all Armstrong respondents reported that they were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" with the climate at Armstrong State University. However, only 14% of respondents at Armstrong State University reported personally having experienced exclusionary, intimidating, offensive, and/or hostile conduct, compared to 20% to 25% of respondents in similar reports. The remaining results paralleled the findings of other climate studies of specific constituent groups offered in the literature.<sup>13</sup>

Armstrong State University's climate assessment report provides baseline data on diversity and inclusion, addressing both the University's mission and two of the core values. While the findings in and of themselves may guide decision-making in regard to policies and practices at Armstrong State University, the cultural fabric of an institution and unique aspects of each campus's environment must be taken into account when considering additional action items based on these findings. The climate assessment findings provide the Armstrong State University community with an opportunity to build upon its strengths but also develop a deeper awareness of the challenges ahead. Armstrong State University, with support from senior administrators and collaborative leadership, is in a prime position to actualize its commitment to an inclusive campus and

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<sup>11</sup> Additional findings disaggregated by position status and other selected demographic characteristics are provided in the full report.

<sup>12</sup> [Rankin & Associates Consulting](#), 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Guiffrida, Gouveia, Wall, & Seward, 2008; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2004; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Sears, 2002; Settles et al., 2006; Silverschanz et al., 2008; Yosso et al., 2009.

to institute organizational structures that respond to the needs of its dynamic campus community.